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THE NIGHTINGALE
THE VALKYRIE AND RAVEN
AND OTHER BALLADS

BY
GEORGE BORROW

LONDON :
PRINTED FOR PRIVATE CIRCULATION

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THE NIGHTINGALE, OR THE TRANSFORMED DAMSEL

I KNOW where stands a Castellaye,
Its turrets are so fairly gilt ;
With silver are its gates inlaid,
Its walls of marble stone are built.

Within it stands a linden tree,
With lovely leaves its boughs are hung,
Therein doth dwell a nightingale,
And sweetly moves that bird its tongue.

A gallant knight came riding by,
He heard its dulcet ditty ring ;
And sorely, sorely, wondered he
At midnight hour that it should sing.

“ And hear, thou little Nightingale,
If thou to me wilt sing a lay,
Thy feathers I'll with gold bedeck,
Thy neck with costly pearls array.”

“ With golden feathers others lure,
Such gifts for me have value slight ;
I am a strange and lonely bird,
But little known to mortal wight.”

“ And thou, a strange wild bird thou be,
Whom other mortals little know ;
Yet hunger pinches thee, and cold,
When falls the cruel winter snow.”

“ I laugh at hunger, laugh at snow,
Which falls so wide on hill and lea ;
But I am vexed by secret care,
I know not either joy or glee.

“ Betwixt the hills and valleys deep
Away the rapid rivers flow ;
But ah ! remembrance of true love
From out the mind will never go.

“O I had once a handsome love,
A famous knight of valour he ;
But ah ! my step-dame all o’erturn’d,
She vowed our marriage ne’er should be.

“She changed me to a Nightingale,
Bade me around the world to fly ;
My Brother she changed to a wolf so gray,
Bade him into the forest hie.

“She told him, as the wood he sought,
That he should win his shape no more,
’Till he had drunk her heart’s blood out,
And that befell when years were o’er.

“It happened on a summer tide,
Amidst the wood she wandered gay,
My brother saw and watched her close,
From ’neath the bushes where he lay.

“He seized her quickly by the foot,
All with his laidly wolfish claw ;
Tore out her heart, and drank her blood,
And thus released himself he saw.

“ Yet I am still a little bird,
And o’er the verdant meads I fly ;
So sorrowful I pass my life,
But mostly ’neath the winter’s sky.

“ But God be thanked, he me has waked,
And speech from him my tongue has won ;
For fifteen years I have not spoke
As I with thee, Sir Knight, have done.

“ But ever with a mournful voice,
Have sung the green wood bough upon ;
And had no better dwelling place
Than gloomy forests, sad and lone.”

“ Now hear, thou little Nightingale,
This simple thing would I propose,
In winter sit within my bower,
And hie thee forth when summer blows.”

“ O many thanks, thou handsome knight
Thy offer would I accept full fane ;
But ah, my step-dame that forbade
Whilst still in feather I remain.”

The Nightingale sat musing deep,
Unto the knight she paid no heed,
Until he seized her by the foot,
For God I ween had so decreed.

He carried her to his chamber in,
The doors and windows fast he made ;
Then changed she to the strangest beasts
That ever mortal eye survey'd.

A lion now, and now a bear,
And now a coil of hissing snakes ;
At last a Dragon she became,
And furious she the knight attacks.

He cut her with a little knife,
So that her blood did stain the floor ;
Then straight before his eye there stood
A Damsel bright as any flower.

“ Now, Damsel fair, I've rescued thee
From thraldom drear and secret care ;
Now tell me of thy ancestry,
Thy parents and thy race declare.”

“ My father he was England’s King,
My mother was his lovely Queen ;
My brother once a grey wolf was,
And trotted o’er the wold so green.”

“ If England’s King thy father was,
And thy dear mother England’s Queen,
Thou art my sister’s daughter then,
Who long a Nightingale has been.”

O there was joy throughout the land,
And all the court was filled with glee ;
The Knight has caught the Nightingale,
That dwelt within the linden tree.

THE VALKYRIE AND RAVEN

YE men wearing bracelets
Be mute whilst I sing
Of Harald the hero—
High Norroway's king ;
I'll duly declare
A discourse which I heard,
Betwixt a bright maiden
And black raven bird.

The Valkyrie's vext
No war-field to find ;
The speech she knew well
Of the wild feather'd kind,
And thus she bespake him
Who bears the brown bill,
So proud as he perch'd on
The peak of the hill.

“What do you here, ravens,
And whence come ye, say,
Your heads turn’d direct to
The dying sun’s ray?
Bits of flesh hold your claws—
There’s blood flowing free
From your beaks, surely nigh
Dead bodies there be.”

Then wiping his beak,
Bloody red, on the rock,
The eagle’s sworn brother
Thus answer’d and spoke:
“Harald we’ve follow’d,
Of Halfdan the son,
Ever since from the egg
That we egress have won.”

“Then ye know, bird, the king,
Whose keep is in Kvine,
The young king—the Norse king—
Whose keels cut the brine;

Red-rimm'd are his bucklers,
 Betarr'd are his oars—
His sails are all bleach'd
 With the sea-spray and showers.'

“ Abroad will drink Yule,
 The young king, and will try
To wake up, O maiden,
 The wild game of Frey,
Of the warmth of the hearth
 He weary is grown ;
He loathes the close chamber
 And cushions of down.

“ Heard ye not the hard fight
 Near Hafirsfirth beach,
'Twixt the king of high kindred
 And Kotva the rich ?
Sail'd ships from the East
 Prepared for war stern ;
Their dragon heads gaped,
 Their gilded sides burn.

“ They were fill’d with proud freemen
Well furnish’d with shields,
And the very best weapons
The western land yields ;
Grimly the Baresarkers
Grinn’d, biting steel,—
Howl’d the wolf-heathens
War madness they feel.

“ They moved ’gainst the monarch
Whose might makes them pine,
’Gainst the king—the Norse king—
Who keeps court at Utstein ;
Flinch’d the king’s bark at first,
For they ply’d her right well—
There was hammering on helmets
Ere Haklangr fell.

“ Left the land to the lad
With the locks long and full,
Rich Kotva, the lord,
Thick of neck, like the bull ;

'Neath the thwarts themselves threw,
They who'd wounds, in despair,
Their heads to the keel
And their heels to the air.

“ On their shoulders their shields,
Such as Swafni's roof form,
Flinging swift as a fence
From the fierce stony storm ;
The yeomen affrighted
From Hafirsfirth speed,
And arrived at their homes
They call hoarsely for mead.

“ The slain strew the strand
To the very great joy
Of ourselves and of Odin,
The chief of one eye.”

Valkyrie.

“ Of his wars and his prowess
With wonder I've heard ;
Now speak of his wives
And his women, O bird !”

Raven.

“ He had damsels from Holmygg
And Hordaland, too ;
And damsels from Hedemark
Dainty of hue ;
But he sent them with gifts
To their countries again,
When he wedded Ranhilda
The beautiful Dane.”

Valkyrie.

“ I warrant he's bounteous !
And well doth reward
The warriors and gallants
His kingdom who guard.”

Raven.

“ O, yes, he is bounteous !
And bravely they fare
Who in Harald's dominions
Hew food for the bear ;

With coin he presents them,
And keen polish'd glaives,
With mail from Hungaria
And Osterland slaves."

"O happy lives have they
Who help him in war,
Can run to the mast-head
Or manage the oar ;
Make the row-locks to creak,
And the row-bench to crack,
And in their lord's service
Are never found slack."

Valkyrie.

"Of the Skalds now I'll ask thee,
The sons of the strain,
By whom deathless honor
He hopes to obtain ;
I doubt not, O Raven,
That thou knowest well
The workers of verse
Who at Harald's court dwell."

Raven.

“ By their gallant array,
By the armlets they bear
All of gold, you may learn
To their lord they are dear ;
Ruddy kirtles they have
That are laced at the skirts,
Swords silver inlaid,
And steely mail shirts :
All gilded their hilts,
Their helmets all graven ;
Gold rings on their hands.”

Valkyrie.

“ Now read me, O Raven,
Of the Baresarkers—how
Do ye style them who wade
In blood ankle-deep
By no danger dismay’d ?”

Raven.

“ Wolf-heathens they hight,
To the thick of the fray
Ruddy shields who do bear,
And with swords clear away ;
None but those who know nought
Of terror can stand
When stout and strong men
Shiver buckler with brand.”

Valkyrie.

“ Of jesting and game
Our discourse shall be brief ;
What does Andadr do,
Harald’s jester in chief ? ”

Raven

“ Fun Andadr loves ;
He makes faces and sneers,
And the monarch doth laugh
At the loon without ears.

There are others who bear
 Burning brands from the fire
Stick a torch 'neath their belt,
 Yet ne'er singe their attire ;
Some that dance on their heels,
 Or that tumble and spring—
O 'tis gay in the hall
 Of high Harald the king !”

ERIK EMUN AND SIR PLOG

EARLY at morn the lark sang gay—

(All underneath so green a hill)

Sir Carl by his bed put on his array—

(The Danish King will 'venge his fill).

He drew on his shirt as white as milk,

Then his doublet foisted with verdant silk.

His legs in his buckskin boots he placed,

And around them his gilded spurs he braced.

His gilded spurs there around he braced,

And away to the Ting he rode in haste.

Sir Carl he galloped along the way,

Such wondrous things he proved that day.

Sir Carl he galloped up to the Ting,
The crowd before him scattering.

To warriors nine the Dane-king cries :
" Bind ye Sir Carl before my eyes."

Up then amain the nine warriors rise,
They bound Sir Carl 'fore their sovereign's eyes.

And out from the town Sir Carl they convey'd,
And upon a new wheel his body laid.

To Sir Plog then quickly a messenger came :
" The Dane-king has broken thy brother's frame."

Sir Plog he sprang o'er the wide, wide board,
But returned in answer no single word.

In his buckskin boots his shanks he cased
And around his gilded spurs he braced.

His gilded spurs there around he tied,
And away to the Ting the noble hied.

And fast and furious was his course,
So leapt and bounded his gallant horse.

Up, up to the Ting Sir Plog he goes,
And up to receive him the Dane-king rose.

“If I had been earlier here to-day,
Then things had turned out in a better way.

“My brother is wheeled though he did no wrong,
That deed, Dane-king, thou shalt rue ere long.

“If four hours sooner I had but come,
My brother, for certain, had followed me home.

“Deprived of his life doth my brother lie,
Dane-king, thou hast lost thine honour thereby.”

The Dane-king so fitting an answer returned :

“Thy brother full richly his death had earned.

“When the great with sword can oppress the
mean

The law is not worth a rotten bean.”

“My brother, Sir King, was good and bold,
I could have redeemed him with silver and gold.”

“Thy silver and gold I hold at nought,
The law shall have the course it ought.

“And since thou so long on this matter doth
prate,

Thou shalt suffer the very same fate.”

To warriors nine the Dane-king cries :

“Bind ye Sir Plog before my eyes.”

“If æ truly brave man, Dane-king, thou be,

Do thou thyself bind and fetter me.”

The King off his hands the little gloves took,

Sir Plog his spear with vehemence shook.

He first slew four, then five he slew,

And the Dane-king himself with his warriors true.

When all the King's men he dead had laid,

His gallant brother he home convey'd.

To Ribe the royal corse they bear,

Where it rests 'neath a tomb of marble fair.

But Sir Plog he went to a foreign shore,

No word they heard of him evermore.

THE ELVES

*Take heed, good people, of yourselves ;
And oh ! beware ye of the elves.*

Once a peasant young and gay
Was in his meadow cutting hay,
There came a lovely looking lass
From out the neighbouring morass.
The lass he woo'd, her promise won,
And soon the bridal day came on.
But when the pair had got to bed,
The bridegroom found, with fear and dread,
That he a rough oak stump embrac'd,
Instead of woman's lovely waist.
Then, to increase his fear and wonder,
There sang a voice his window under :

“Come out to her whom thou didst wed,
Upon my mead the bed is spread.”
From that wild lay the peasant knew
He with a fay had had to do.

*Take heed, good people, of yourselves ;
And oh ! beware ye of the elves.*

FERIDUN

No face of an Angel could Feridun claim,
Nor of musk nor of amber I ween was his frame ;
In bright generosity beauteous was he,
Be generous like him and as fair thou shalt be.

EPIGRAMS

1.

A worthless thing is song, I trow,
From out the heart which does not flow ;
But song from out no heart will flow
Which does not feel of love the glow.

2.

Though pedants have essayed to hammer
Into our heads the points of grammar ;
We're oft obliged to set at nought
The different force of *should* and *ought* ;
And oft are sorely puzzled whether
We should make use of *both* or *either*.

3.

When of yourself you have cause to speak
Always make yourself broad and tall ;
Envy attacks you if you are great,
But thorough contempt attends the small.

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